

HOW THE TASK FORCE IS ADVANCING EQUITY ACROSS UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES BY SUPPORTING WORKER ORGANIZING AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

By supporting workers' ability to organize and collectively bargain, the U.S. Department of Labor initiatives coming out of the Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment will also advance the Administration's goal of ensuring greater equity for underserved populations and communities, especially workers of color, women, and workers with disabilities. Below is a summary of the impact that unions have on these workers.

How Unions Advance Equity for Underserved Populations

- Unions boost pay, benefits, and working conditions for all workers, but have especially important **effects** for workers who often face exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination in the workplace, including workers of color, women, and workers with disabilities.
- By providing a vehicle for workers to negotiate terms of their employment – like compensation, schedules, and working conditions – in a legally-binding collective bargaining agreement, unions help reduce opportunities for arbitrary treatment of workers by their managers and supervisors.
- Collective bargaining also creates greater transparency around pay-setting and promotion, ensuring that workers have a clearer picture of how much their coworkers in similar jobs and in more senior positions are being paid.
- Collective bargaining can provide standardized and transparent means for workers to be retrained or identify new work if they experience an illness or disability that prevents them from doing their original jobs.
- In addition, by providing greater job security to workers covered by a union contract, including in the form of due process protections, unions help protect workers from being disciplined, dismissed, or passed over for promotion, or from being harassed on the basis of their race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other protected characteristics. Indeed, before the Supreme Court's 2020 decision holding that federal workplace antidiscrimination law protects gay and transgender workers, union contracts could explicitly provide LGBTQ+ workers with legally binding protections against workplace discrimination, especially in cities and states whose laws failed to provide such explicit protection.
- These union protections are reflected in pay data: the gender pay gap is **narrower** for unionized workers than for non-union workers. The union advantage is especially large for women of color, as well as workers of color with lower levels of formal education. Research has also **documented** that declining unionization rates throughout the 1970s and 1980s have contributed to rising racial wage gaps between white and Black workers.
- Looking at workers with disabilities, **research** shows that the union pay advantage is larger for workers who report limitations on their activity (suggesting a possible disability) than workers who do not, and that unionized workers are more likely to request accommodations from their employers than non-union workers, reflecting the greater voice that unions can provide to workers, including those with disabilities.
- Women still shoulder the majority of responsibility for caregiving. Unions help promote greater gender equity by securing job-protected paid leave support for workers, both in individual collective bargaining **agreements** as well as through their **advocacy** for local, state, and federal paid leave proposals.
- And some unions, often in partnership with community-based organizations, have also **taken** important steps to open more occupational pathways to women and workers of color, including through initiatives like pre-apprenticeship programs. These partnerships can help to disrupt patterns of occupational segregation that shut women and workers of color out of good-paying jobs with strong earnings-growth potential.

